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Hawai'i in the Movies, 1898–1959, Part IV

THIS RESEARCH NOTE further amends the lists of feature films made in or about Hawai'i previously published by the Hawaiian Historical Society. In 1988, the Society issued a monograph describing 120 such motion pictures produced prior to statehood.¹ Three years later an addendum listed twelve others, plus further details about three of the films previously cited.² Three others were added in 1992.³ Here are twenty-six more that have come to the author's attention since then, plus new material on one noted earlier.

1933

Lucky Devils

RKO Radio. 3 Feb. 1933; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 60, 64, or 70 min. Dir., Ralph Ince. With Bill Boyd, Dorothy Wilson, William Gargan. Adventure-drama about Hollywood stuntmen. Halfway through the picture, the hero marries and honeymoon in Hawai'i.⁴

1934

Song of the Islands

Palmer Miller and Curtis Nagel for the Hawaii Tourist Bureau. 1934; Hon., NA. Sound, Vericolor (an early two-color process), 40 min.

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The Hawaiian Journal of History, vol. 30 (1996)

Dir., NA. With Pualani Mossman, Sam Kapu, Ray Kinney, Don Blanding.

A travelogue about the Islands, made for the Hawaii Tourist Bureau. The same title was used in a 1942 Betty Grable musical. Four ten-minute travelogues, one each for the major islands, were produced by the same group and also released in 1934. All five films were rescued from a trash barrel and restored by Lowell Angell for the Bishop Museum in 1992.⁵

1935

Rocky Mountain Mystery

Paramount. 8 Feb. 1935; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 63 or 68 min. Dir., Charles Barton. With Charles "Chic" Sale, Mrs. Leslie Carter, Ann Sheridan, Randolph Scott.

A western/mystery, filmed in California. At the end, the hero and heroine marry and set up housekeeping on a ranch in Hawai'i.⁶

1936

Anything Goes

Paramount. 24 Jan. 1936; Princess, 11 March 1936. Sound, b&w, 90 or 92 min. Dir., Lewis Milestone. With Bing Crosby, Ethel Merman, Charlie Ruggles, Ida Lupino.

The Cole Porter musical comedy about entertainers, gangsters, and others aboard an ocean liner sailing from New York to Southampton. Some shipboard background shots were filmed in Honolulu. Reviews of the picture varied widely.⁷

Charlie Chan at the Race Track

20th Century-Fox. 7 Aug. 1936; Hawaii Theater, 25 Oct. 1936. Sound, b&w, 70 min. Dir., H. Bruce Humberstone. With Warner Oland, Keye Luke, Helen Wood.

An Australian taking his prize horse to the Santa Juanita Handicap is killed aboard a liner as it approaches O'ahu. Honolulu detective Charlie Chan, investigating, continues with the ship to California. There, Chan foils race track gangsters attempting to fix the race and solves the murder. Although the picture supposedly begins at the Honolulu Police Station, no location shooting is evident. Reviews were mixed.⁸

High Tension

20th Century-Fox. 17 July 1936; Hawaii Theater, 7 April 1937. Sound, b&w, 62 or 63 min. Dir., Allan Dwan. With Brian Donlevy, Norman Foster, Glenda Farrell.

A deep-sea diver takes a risky assignment mending the Honolulu-San Francisco cable, working out of Honolulu, rescuing a buddy underwater, and romancing a brassy writer of magazine adventure fiction. Reviews were generally favorable, although the *Star-Bulletin* criticized the film's portrayal of Honolulu as a place "where nobody works between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., where people ride about in bullock carts, and where cable company employees reside in a little colony all their own." Obviously filmed elsewhere.⁹

1937

Charlie Chan at the Olympics

20th Century-Fox. 21 May 1937; Hawaii Theater, 20 June 1937. Sound, b&w, 71 min. Dir., H. Bruce Humberstone. With Warner Oland, Katherine DeMille, Pauline Moore, Keye Luke.

Chan investigates the disappearance of an experimental airplane over O'ahu and the murder of its Navy pilot. Leaving Honolulu, he pursues foreign agents by Pan Am clipper, transcontinental aircraft, and the dirigible *Hindenburg* to Berlin, where "No. 1 son" Lee Chan is competing in the Olympics as a member of the U.S. swimming team. No record of Hawai'i location filming. Reviews were mostly favorable.¹⁰

Fly Away Baby

Warner Bros. 19 June 1937; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 60 min. Dir., Frank McDonald. With Glenda Farrell, Barton MacLane.

Reporter Torchy Blane and her fiancé, policeman Steve McBride, join a dirigible flight around the world in pursuit of a murderer thought to be aboard. When the airship lands at Honolulu, they unsuccessfully search a suspect's room, then continue on until, at the climax, the slayer leaps to his death trying to parachute from the dirigible. No record of location filming. *Variety's* comments were generally favorable; those of the *New York Times* much less so.¹¹

Think Fast, Mr. Moto

20th Century-Fox. 27 Aug. 1937; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 66 or 70 min. Dir., Norman Foster. With Peter Lorre, Virginia Field, Thomas Beck.

Kentaro Moto, a Japanese American businessman and amateur detective, pursues jewel smugglers across the Pacific from San Francisco's Chinatown to Shanghai. During a brief layover in Honolulu, Moto's liner is boarded by a mysterious woman. First in a series that eventually reached eight pictures, this picture received generally favorable reviews.¹²

Nudist Land

States Rights (dist.). 1937; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 6 reels. Dir., A. Royal Horter.

A documentary that begins with scenes of the healthful lifestyles of people in Africa, Bali, Samoa, and Hawai'i, then describes in detail life in an Oregon nudist camp. A review called this film "entirely inoffensive . . . entirely moral."¹³

Renai Hawaii Kooro (Lovers in Hawaii's Paradise)

Nikkatsu. 1937; Waikiki Theater, 1 Jan. 1938. Japanese dialogue, b&w, length NA. Dir., NA. With Sugi Kyoji, Hoshi Reiko, Shima Koji.

Kyota and Miyoko, from a small Japanese village, marry despite parental objections and go to Tokyo. There, Kyota rescues a Hawai'i theater man from muggers and as a reward is given an introduction to the man's son, Makihara, in Honolulu. The son arranges a try-out for the couple at the Waikiki Theater, where their act combining classical Japanese dances with the Hawaiian hula is a sensational success. They return in triumph to Japan, where they receive their parents' belated blessing.

Shooting began locally in July 1937 and included scenes of Punchbowl, the Punahou campus, the Waikiki Theater, the docking of the *Asama Maru* at Pier 11, and Maui and the Big Island. Several local Japanese appeared in supporting roles.¹⁴

1938

Hollywood Stadium Mystery

Republic. 21 Feb. 1938; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 65–66 min. Dir., David Howard. With Neil Hamilton, Evelyn Venable, Jimmy Wallington.

Mystery set in Hollywood. At the end, "Bill . . . suggests [to Polly] they try Hawaii, where they go on their honeymoon."¹⁵

Held For Ransom

International Film Corp.; dist., Grand National Films. 17 June 1938; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 59 min. Dir., Clarence Bricker. With Blanche Mehaffey, Grant Withers.

Kidnapping drama. At its conclusion, "Larry and Betty decide to marry and sail to Hawaii on their honeymoon." *Variety* called this film "very poor."¹⁶

Meet the Girls

20th Century–Fox. 7 Oct. 1938; Liberty Theater, 27 Oct. 1938. Sound, b&w, 60, 66, or 70 min. Dir., Eugene Forde. With June Lang, Lynn Bari, Gene Lockhart, Robert Allen, Ruth Donnelly.

Two young women lose their jobs as entertainers in Honolulu. Broke, they stow away on a San Francisco-bound liner, where they get mixed up with a diamond thief, a gigolo, a hypochondriac, a watchful ship's captain, a sailor, and a drunk. *Variety* panned the picture. No mention of location shooting in the Islands.¹⁷

1939

Charlie Chan in Reno

20th Century-Fox. 16 June 1939; Liberty Theater, 23 Sept. 1939. Sound, b&w, 65 or 70 min. Dir., Norman Foster. With Sidney Toler, Ricardo Cortez, Phyllis Brooks, Slim Summerville.

When a young Island woman is arrested in Reno on a murder charge, Chan travels to Nevada to defend her. The film begins in the Honolulu Police Department laboratory, but was probably shot elsewhere. Reviews were mixed.¹⁸

Charlie Chan at Treasure Island

20th Century-Fox. 8 Sept. 1939; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 59, 71, 72, or 74 min. Dir., Norman Foster. With Sidney Toler, Cesar Romero, Pauline Moore.

Chan is aboard a Pan Am clipper flight from Honolulu to San Francisco when, during a storm, a fellow passenger apparently commits suicide. After landing in California, Chan investigates and solves the mystery. This is another of the many movies that take place partly on ships or aircraft en route to or from the Islands. Reviews were mixed.¹⁹

1941

Dive Bomber

Warner Brothers. Aug. 1941; Waikiki Theater, 14 Nov. 1941. Sound, Technicolor, 130 or 133 min. Dir., Michael Curtiz. With Errol Flynn, Fred MacMurray, Ralph Bellamy, Alexis Smith.

A U.S. Navy flight surgeon assigned to a squadron in Hawai'i (and later San Diego) studies pilot black-out during power dives. Mostly filmed at San Diego and Pensacola Naval Air Stations, with a few background shots of Pearl Harbor. Praised for its aerial photography and grasp of flight medicine but not for its plotting or romance.²⁰

The Perfect Snob

20th Century-Fox. 14 Nov. 1941; Liberty, 3 March 1942. Sound, b&w, 61 or 63 min. Dir., Ray McCarey. With Charlie Ruggles, Lynn Bari, Cornel Wilde, Charlotte Greenwood, Alan Mowbray, Anthony Quinn.

A girl vacationing in Hawai'i with her parents is told by her mother to marry for money but by her father to choose love. Fortunately, the supposedly poor young man she falls for turns out to be the owner of a sugar plantation. Includes "natives" and a "witch doctor" mostly played by haoles. Presumably shot on the Mainland. So-so reviews.²¹

Blue, White and Perfect

20th Century-Fox. 18 Dec. 1941; Liberty, 21 March 1942. Sound, b&w, 73, 74, or 78 min. Dir., Herbert I. Leeds. With Lloyd Nolan, Mary Beth Hughes.

Private investigator Michael Shayne pursues spies who are smuggling industrial diamonds to the enemy, following them aboard a Honolulu-bound liner and nabbing them as it makes port. This picture, released only eleven days after the Pearl Harbor attack, was the first to show the United States clearly involved in World War II. Reviews were average to somewhat above average.²²

1943

Gung Ho!

Universal. 17 Dec. 1943; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 88 min. Dir., Ray Enright. With Randolph Scott, Noah Beery, Jr., Alan Curtis.

"Carlson's Raiders" are followed from their initial selection and train-

ing to their bloody raid on Makin Island in August 1942. The O'ahu training scenes are accompanied by stock shots of Pearl Harbor and Diamond Head. Reviews were mostly favorable.²³

1944

Wing and a Prayer

20th Century-Fox. 12 July 1944; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 96, 97 or 98 min. Dir., Henry Hathaway. With Dana Andrews, Don Ameche, Charles Bickford, William Eythe.

About a U.S. aircraft carrier at sea between the Pearl Harbor attack and the Battle of Midway. Includes documentary and newsreel footage of Pearl Harbor and Wake Island. Generally favorable reviews.²⁴

1946

Flight to Nowhere

Golden Gate/Screen Guild. 1946; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 75 min. Dir., William Rowland. With Alan Curtis, Evelyn Ankers, Jack Holt, Hoot Gibson.

This film opens in Honolulu, where a Korean courier is slain before he can give a Justice Department operative a map pinpointing uranium deposits on a South Sea island. The hero, a former intelligence agent now employed as a charter pilot, flies everybody to a Death Valley hotel, where two more homicides take place and the map passes through many hands. Called a "bottom of the barrel film" by Nash and Ross and a "bomb . . . ultracheap, ultra boring" by Maltin. Location shooting unlikely.²⁵

1949

Task Force

Warner Brothers. 14 July 1949; Kuhio Theater, 21 Oct. 1949. Sound, b&w with color sequences, 116 min. Dir., Delmer Daves. With Gary Cooper, Jane Wyatt, Wayne Morris, Walter Brennan.

The development of naval carrier aviation from the 1920s through the 1940s, as seen by an officer stationed at Pearl Harbor in the 1930s and again in 1941 and present at the Battle of Midway. The Hawai'i scenes are partly stock footage and partly faked. Above average reviews.²⁶

1951

Let's Go Navy

Monogram. 26 July 1951; Hon., NA. Sound, b&w, 68 min. Dir., William Beaudine. With Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall, Allen Jenkins.

The "Bowery Boys" join the Navy to pursue sailors who have robbed them. Their travels take them, among other places, to a Honolulu curio store, where they encounter a hula dancer and buy a talking parrot. Twenty-third in a long-running series, this entry was surprisingly well received by critics.²⁷

1958

The Naked and the Dead

RKO/Warner Bros. 7 Aug. 1958; Hon., NA. Sound, color, 131 min. Dir., Raoul Walsh. With Aldo Ray, Cliff Robertson, Raymond Massey.

A bowdlerized filming of Norman Mailer's notorious World War II novel. The picture starts in 1943 in a Honolulu bar, where female strippers rather modestly perform before rowdy servicemen, then moves to the South Pacific war theater. Nash and Ross called it "a dismal film of a talky, overrated novel."²⁸

1959

Up Periscope!

Lakeside/Warner Brothers. 27 Jan. 1959; Waikiki Theater, 24 Apr. 1959. Sound, color, Warnerscope, 111 min. Dir., Gordon Douglas. With James Garner, Edmond O'Brien.

During World War II, a Pearl Harbor-based submarine commander

and a Navy frogman are assigned to capture a vital code from the Japanese on a South Pacific island. Mixed reviews. *Variety* particularly objected to the ending: the victorious sub returns to Pearl "to find wives, sweethearts, etc., all standing on the pier cheering their men home [which] seems a little unbelievable, considering it's war-time."²⁹

Don't Give Up the Ship

Paramount/Hal Wallis Prod. 25 May 1959; King, Palace and Waialae Drive In Theaters, 24 June 1959. Sound, b&w, 89 min. Dir., Norman Taurog. With Jerry Lewis, Dina Merrill.

An ensign, given command of a destroyer escort during World War II, is charged with failure to turn it in at the end of hostilities. One scene portrays his angst-ridden initial departure from Pearl Harbor. Panned by the *New York Times* as an exceptionally unfunny comedy.³⁰

NOTES

- ¹ Robert C. Schmitt, *Hawai'i in the Movies 1898-1959* (Honolulu: HHS, 1988).
- ² Robert C. Schmitt, "Some Movies We Missed," *HJH* 25 (1991): 197-204.
- ³ Robert C. Schmitt, "More Movies We Missed," *HJH* 26 (1992): 227-29.
- ⁴ *The American Film Institute Catalog. Feature Films, 1931-1940*, 3 vol. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 1261-62.
- ⁵ Ron Jacobs, "Romantic Deja Views," *Hawaii Magazine* 10 (March-April 1993): 94-96; film notes distributed at Nov. 17, 1992, showing at Atherton Halau, Bishop Museum.
- ⁶ *AFI Catalog* 1818-19.
- ⁷ *AFI Catalog* 72; *The New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968* (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1970), vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1252; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980* (New York: Garland, 1983), vol. 5, 1934-1937, entry for 12 Feb. 1936; *HA* 12 Mar. 1936: 4; *HSB* 12 Mar. 1936: 9.
- ⁸ *The New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1310; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980* (New York: Garland, 1983), vol. 5, 1934-1937, entry for 19 Aug. 1936; Jay Robert Nash and Stanley Ralph Ross, *The Motion Picture Guide 1927-1983*, C-D (Chicago: Cinebooks, 1985) 400; *AFI Catalog* 321; Ken Hanke, *Charlie Chan at the Movies* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1989) 73-82; Tony Thomas and Aubrey Solomon, *The Films of 20th Century-Fox* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1979) 32-33; *HA* 25 Oct. 1936: 10; *HA* 26 Oct. 1936: 2.
- ⁹ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1301; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 5, 1934-1937, entry for 15 July 1936; Nash and Ross,

- Motion Picture Guide*, H-K (1986) 1230; *AFI Catalog* 919; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 36; *HSB* 8 Apr. 1937: 10.
- ¹⁰ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1394; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 5, 1934-1937, entry for 26 May 1937; *AFI Catalog* 320; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 49; Hanke, *Charlie Chan at the Movies* 89-97; *HSB* 21 June 1937: 6.
- ¹¹ *AFI Catalog* 667-68; *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1407; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 5, 1934-1937, entry for 14 July 1937.
- ¹² *AFI Catalog* 2176; *Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 5, 1907-1980, entry for 18 Aug. 1937; *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1418; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 5, 1934-1937, entry for 18. Aug. 1937.
- ¹³ *AFI Catalog* 1535.
- ¹⁴ Consolidated Amusement Co., *Show Parade* for week of 26 Dec. 1937. I am indebted to Lowell Angell, whose collection includes bound volumes of *Show Parade*, for calling this source to my attention. The citation for this film in my 1988 monograph was limited to major credits.
- ¹⁵ *AFI Catalog* 944-45.
- ¹⁶ *AFI Catalog* 884-85; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 6, 1938-1942, entry for 20 July 1938.
- ¹⁷ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 2, 1932-1938, 1527; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 6, 1938-1942, entry for 31 Aug. 1938; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, L-M (1986) 1921; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 74; *AFI Catalog* 1347; *HSB* 27 Oct. 1938: 10.
- ¹⁸ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 3, 1939-1948, 1610; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 6, 1938-1942, entry for 7 June 1939; *AFI Catalog* 326; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 83; Hanke, *Charlie Chan at the Movies* 117-18; *HSB* 23 Sept. 1939: 13.
- ¹⁹ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 3, 1939-1948, 1631; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 6, 1938-1942, entry for 23 Aug. 1939; *AFI Catalog* 322; Hanke, *Charlie Chan at the Movies* 123-29; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 82.
- ²⁰ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 3, 1939-1948, 1807; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, C-D (1985) 668; Tony Thomas, Rudy Behlmer, and Clifford McCarty, *The Films of Errol Flynn* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1969) 103-5; Tony Thomas, *Errol Flynn, The Spy Who Never Was* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1990) 121-28; *HSB* 15 Nov. 1941: 3.
- ²¹ *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 6, 1938-1942, entry for 19 Nov. 1941; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, N-R (1986) 2373; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 117; *HSB* 2 March 1942: 8.
- ²² *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 6, 1938-1942, entry for 24 Dec. 1941; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, A-B (1985) 251; Thomas and Solomon, *Films of 20th Century-Fox* 110-11; *HSB* 21 Mar. 1942: 13.
- ²³ *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 7, 1943-1948, entry for 22 Dec. 1943; *New*

- York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 23, 1939-1948, 1982; South Seas Cinema Society, "South Seas Cinema" (unpublished, Nov. 1995).
- ²⁴ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 3, 1939-1948, 2017-18; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 7, 1943-1948, entry for 19 July 1944; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, W-Z (1987) 3871-72.
- ²⁵ Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, E-G (1986) 878; Leonard Maltin, ed., *Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1993* (New York: Signet, 1992) 409; *Video Yesteryear* (catalogue) (Sandy Hook, Conn.: 1991) 75.
- ²⁶ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 4, 1949-1958, 2363; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 8, 1949-1953, entry for 20 July 1949; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, T-V (1987) 3287; *HSB* 21 Oct. 1949: 18.
- ²⁷ *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 8, 1949-1953, entry for 1 Aug. 1951; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, L-M (1986) 1658-59; South Seas Cinema Society, "South Seas Cinema."
- ²⁸ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 4, 1949-1958, 3074; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, N-R (1986) 2099.
- ²⁹ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 5, 1959-1968, 3112-13; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 10, 1959-1963, entry for 11 Feb. 1959; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, T-V (1987) 3646; *HSB* 24 Apr. 1959: 20.
- ³⁰ *New York Times Film Reviews 1913-1968*, vol. 5, 1959-1968, 3137; *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 10, 1959-1963, entry for 3 June 1959; Nash and Ross, *Motion Picture Guide*, C-D (1985) 692; *HSB* 24 June 1959: 27.